

XXXII.—*Some Notes on the Winter Avifauna of the Camargue.* By LUDLOW GRISCOM, M.A.Ö.U., M.B.O.U. ; American Museum of Natural History, New York City.

FOR a region which has long been famous as a bird paradise, remarkably little has been written about the Camargue, due in part perhaps to its comparative isolation and the primitive living conditions required in so dreary and uninhabited a waste. The classic work on this region is the 'Ornithologie du Gard et des Pays circonvoisins' by J. Crespon, a rare work published by private subscription in 1840, a copy of which I was so fortunate as to obtain in Paris and took with me. It is remarkable for its excellent detailed accounts of habits and occurrence of the various species, founded on many years of personal collecting. Two other works appeared shortly thereafter—'Faune Méridionale du Midi de la France' (Crespon, 1844), an elaboration, chiefly territorial, of his earlier work; and the 'Richesses Ornithologiques du Midi de la France' (Jaubert and Barthélemy-Lapommeraye, 1859). The latter work is chiefly of value for its information about the bird-life of Marseilles and the Riviera, being almost entirely a compilation so far as the Camargue is concerned. Crespon's original work is not quoted by them, oddly enough. In 'The Ibis' for April 1895 and October 1898, Mr. Wm. Eagle Clarke published two very interesting and valuable papers on this region, based on visits in May and early June, 1894, and part of September, 1896. The first paper contained a map and so excellent and adequate an account of the topography of the region, that repetition would be useless, and readers are referred to it for information on these points.

I have wandered for many years in Europe with an increasing determination to visit the Camargue. Twice I had been in Arles, but was absolutely unable to find the time for the briefest kind of a side-trip. While with the American Expeditionary Forces in 1918, a conversation

with Dr. Chalmers Mitchell crystallized anew this determination; and a week's leave of absence around Christmas of 1918 gave me the longed-for opportunity. Stopping long enough in Paris to procure Crespon's book, I arrived at Les Saintes Maries the morning of 29 Dec., and remained until the afternoon of 1 Jan., 1919. It was a somewhat strenuous vacation, as the number of hours in the field each day was exactly the number of hours of daylight with a liberal margin at each end for a good start and a return. The country within five miles of the village to the north and east was thoroughly explored. On 31 Dec., I left the village shortly after dawn in a two-wheeled wagon with the manager of a bull-farm about three miles west of the centre of the Étang de Valcarès, where we arrived an hour later. He was a local Provençal poet of note, and while my teeth rattled in my head, he favoured me with specimens of his art, and it did not discourage him at all that I disclaimed any knowledge of the language! At the bull-farm I changed very thankfully to horseback, and we rode to the edge of the Étang, where there was a farmer living in a picturesque stone manse which his ancestors had built six centuries ago. He became my guide to the haunts of the Flamingo and the islands at the south end of the Étang de Valcarès. It was a great disappointment to miss this famous bird, whose temporary absence was accounted for by the natives as due to the low water caused by a long drought. In every other respect, however, the day was one of the most eventful ornithologically I have ever had. Not the least interesting part of the day was the return after dark. The owner of the horse assured me that its home was Les Saintes Maries, and that it would get there without any assistance from me. It did. We started about 8 P.M. without a moon, with not even a track or a bridle-path the first two-thirds of the way. The only sign of life was a lighthouse twenty-five miles to the south-west. The wind sighed over the plains, an occasional flock of Geese honked overhead, or a Lapwing complained at our approach. Even the horse seemed to feel the loneliness, as it would occasionally stop, look round,

and would not go on until I had spoken to it or patted it. The going was slow, as there were constant detours to avoid marshes or ponds, but at 11.30 P.M. sharp that horse halted before the door of its stable in the village.

In his second paper Mr. Eagle Clarke mentioned the rapid advance of civilization in the Camargue, and somewhat pessimistically predicted the passing of the Flamingo and the ornithological glory of this region. I could not see that civilization had progressed materially since his account was written, and I doubt if the bird-life has decreased markedly. The small native population still takes a heavy toll of eggs in the breeding-season, but the winter bird-life seems quite safe. They all have guns, and most of the men went hunting every day I was there, but the total game of the village was two Mallards and one Spotted Crake : surely a negligible factor ! Birds were exceedingly abundant and many comparatively tame, the dominant features being the number and variety of Hawks, always noteworthy in western Europe, and the almost unbelievable quantity of waterfowl. On 31 Dec., I saw fifty-three species of birds, and more individuals than on any other day anywhere where I have been in either hemisphere. The Étang de Valcarès was black with waterfowl in every direction, and the chorus of voices coming over the silent waters from countless thousands of Mallard and Widgeon made an unforgettable impression.

On 2 Jan. the day was spent south and west of Arles. Birds were decidedly common, but exceedingly shy and wary, so much so that it was impossible in many cases to approach sufficiently near to identify them.

It would be absurd to claim that the following list of species was complete. Still it is believed that it will give some definite idea of the present-day winter bird-life of this interesting region, about which no definite contributions have been made since the days of Crespon and his friends eighty years ago, when French interest in ornithology was at its zenith. The writer's military duties absolutely precluded general collecting, which would have greatly decreased the time spent in the field and the amount of territory covered

in any event. To those who are a little shy of sight identifications, the writer can only say that he is about as familiar with the birds of western Europe as he is with those of his own country. Even so, these notes would not have been submitted had it not been for the encouragement of the Editor of 'The Ibis.' The order of families and the nomenclature follow the 'Hand-List of British Birds,' the most convenient at hand.

**Corvus corone corone L.**

Only two individuals seen near Les Saintes Maries. They probably straggle down to feed in the marshes from the more wooded country to the north and west.

**Pica pica pica L.**

Abundant everywhere, not even objecting to wading in shallow water.

**Chloris chloris chloris (L.).**

A small flock of Greenfinches present in the outskirts of Les Saintes Maries, where there were some gardens, a few hedges, and what by courtesy might be called a pasture. Common near Arles.

**Carduelis carduelis carduelis (L.).**

Four birds with the Greenfinches at Les Saintes Maries. Fairly common near Arles.

**Carduelis cannabina cannabina (L.).**

A few Linnets with the other Finches.

**Fringilla cœlebs cœlebs L.**

A single Chaffinch was seen near the farmhouse by the Étang de Valcarès. Common at Arles.

**Passer domesticus domesticus L.**

A flock of ten birds at Les Saintes Maries. Common at Arles.

**Passer montanus montanus (L.).**

A flock of six birds at Les Saintes Maries. Abundant near Arles.

**Emberiza citrinella citrinella** L.

A single bird seen near Arles. Crespon says this species is common only in cold weather.

**Emberiza schoeniclus schoeniclus** L.

A common species in the marshes. Efforts to find *E. palustris* Savi were unavailing.

**Calandrella brachydactyla brachydactyla** (Leisler).

Only two birds seen in the wastes east of Les Saintes Maries. Not supposed to occur in this région in winter according to the old French authors, and its presence possibly due in part to the very mild and warm fall.

**Lullula arborea arborea** (L.).

A few birds in the "pasture" near Les Saintes Maries. One in full song 30 Dec.

**Alauda arvensis arvensis** L.

Abundant throughout the Camargue. Common near Arles.

**Anthus trivialis trivialis** (L.).

Crespon calls the Tree-Pipit of rare occurrence in winter, and 'Les Richesses' does not mention it at this season. There was a good-sized flock of these birds with the Wood-Larks and Finches in the outskirts of Les Saintes Maries. The old French authors may have been mistaken about its status in winter. At any rate, I saw two birds near Angers on 17 Jan., 1920, much farther north.

**Anthus pratensis** (L.).

Abundant in the wastes of the Camargue.

**Anthus spinoletta spinoletta** (L.).

The Water-Pipit was mingled with the flocks of Meadow-Pipits. Only a few birds were positively identified, and it was probably commoner than my observations would indicate.

**Motacilla cinerea cinerea** Tunstall.

A single Grey Wagtail was seen near Les Saintes Maries.

**Motacilla alba alba** L.

The White Wagtail was seen near Arles only.

**Parus major major** L.

Seen near Arles only. The scarcity of Tits was rather surprising.

**Regulus regulus regulus** (L.).

A single Golderest seen in some bushes near the Étang de Valcarès.

**Regulus ignicapillus ignicapillus** (Temm.).

Two birds seen near Arles.

**Phylloscopus collybita collybita** (Vieill.).

Two birds seen near Arles.

**Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus** (L.).

The Willow-Wren was common in the tamarisks near Les Saintes Maries. Not given by Crespon as a winter resident, though now known to occur sparingly in Mediterranean countries.

**Cettia cetti cetti** (Marm.).

Cetti's Warbler, while given as a resident by Crespon, is apparently not common in winter. Only two birds were seen in a ditch, densely overgrown with bushes, several miles north of Les Saintes Maries. The remarkable notes given as I approached their haunts, alone betrayed the presence of this secretive bird. I found that they could be "squeaked up" readily if I remained absolutely motionless. Any effort to stalk them was a dismal failure; they simply melted away.

**Cisticola cisticola** Temm.

A single Fantail Warbler was flushed in some very thick marshy growth near the Étang de Valcarès. Its small size and the black, white, and chestnut tail, especially conspicuous as it flies away from you, easily distinguish it from the other shy Bush- and Marsh-Warblers of the region.

**Acrocephalus aquaticus** (Gm.).

One of the surprises of the trip was the discovery that this species was apparently not uncommon in the marshes.



There is no difficulty in distinguishing it in life from the Sedge-Warbler, with which I am familiar. The broad buffy stripe down the centre of the crown, bounded on both sides by an even broader blackish one, is a very diagnostic field-character. The back and rump are more conspicuously streaked, and all the birds I saw had some narrow streaks on the sides.

The Aquatic Warbler was found only in what I should call a tussock-marsh, where the water was comparatively fresh and the vegetation not more than a foot high. I saw none in bushy places along ditches or in the reed-beds. While very secretive in habits, it could not be called exactly shy. A tussock is a rather restricted environment, and the bird is forced to fly to reach the next one, and in this way its presence can be discovered. It dives hastily into the base of the tussock, and the slight wobbling of the vegetation is the only sign of its presence. About once every two minutes the performance is repeated. It will not flush unless the tussock in which it is hiding is actually kicked. By taking advantage of this habit, and the fact that when unalarmed it tends to travel in a straight line, a satisfactory observation can finally be made. Mark the tussock in which the bird has taken refuge, and make a detour, and seat yourself on another tussock directly in the probable line of progress. After about a minute's perfect quiet the moving of the vegetation will prove that the danger is supposed to be over, and as likely as not the bird will fly in your direction. Your presence arouses more curiosity than anything else if perfect silence and quiet is maintained, and a little head and bright eye will emerge for a few seconds from the grass to inspect you. Apparently the ear is more easily offended than the eye. On one occasion a bird mounted to the summit of a tussock and sat quietly for several minutes, while I was sitting perfectly still about twenty-five feet away.

There seems to be considerable question as to the status of this species in the Camargue. Crespon states emphatically that it is a resident, and mentions having killed several in winter. 'Les Richesses' gives it as a common migrant in

April and September, a few remaining to breed. The former states that he never personally met with the Sedge-Warbler, while the latter work calls it a rare migrant. Mr. Eagle Clarke met with neither species on either of his trips. Modern handbooks state that the winter home of the Aquatic Warbler is not known for certain. I am not aware that Crespon's positive statement has ever been disproved.

***Sylvia melanocephala melanocephala* (Gm.).**

A single bird of this species was studied for half an hour in a thick clump of tamarisk bushes near Les Saintes Maries. It is easily distinguished from the Blackcap by the white in the tail and its much smaller size. Another was seen on a stony bush-covered hillside near Arles. Two other Warblers seen near Arles may have been Blackcaps, but I was unable to get a satisfactory view. Both species are resident.

***Sylvia (Melizophilus) undata undata* (Bodd.).**

Not uncommon in the wastes east of Les Saintes Maries. Very shy and about as hard to observe as a field-mouse. I have never seen a bird do the "disappearing act" more perfectly. One was seen to put down in an isolated clump of sea-blite without any nearby vegetation. It took me but a few seconds to reach this clump, but the bird wasn't there when I arrived, and I was unable to rediscover it.

**? *Turdus pilaris* L.**

A single very wild bird seen near Arles, probably this species, but the identification by no means satisfactory.

***Turdus merula merula* L.**

A single male seen on two occasions near Les Saintes Maries. Mr. Eagle Clarke did not meet with this species in the Delta, where it seems to be a decidedly rare bird.

***Saxicola rubetra rubetra* (L.).**

Apparently a rare bird in western Europe in winter, and its presence was probably due to the remarkably mild fall. Two birds seen in the truck-patches near Les Saintes Maries, and another near Arles. Not given as occurring in winter by the old French authors.



**Saxicola torquata rubicola (L.).**

A few in the wastes east of Les Saintes Maries, and one near Arles.

**Phœnicurus ochrurus gibraltariensis (Gm.).**

A single male seen near the Étang de Valcarès in the garden of the old farm.

**Erithacus rubecula rubecula (L.).**

Apparently a winter visitor only to the Delta of the Rhone. Common near Arles, and a single bird near Les Saintes Maries.

**Troglodytes troglodytes troglodytes (L.).**

It was a considerable surprise to find the Wren by no means uncommon in the marshes north of Les Saintes Maries, where it preferred the ditches overgrown with bushes affected by Cetti's Warbler—surely an unusual association.

**Gecinus viridis viridis (L.).**

A single bird near Arles. Very much wilder than in any other part of Europe where I have encountered this species.

**Falco columbarius æsalon Tunstall.**

The little Merlin was fairly common in the marshes north and east of Les Saintes Maries.

**Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus (L.).**

Common everywhere.

**Falco naumanni naumanni Fleisch.**

An adult male Lesser Kestrel was very well seen both sitting and flying on 29 Dec., the smaller size and clear unspotted back being good field-marks. An ordinary Kestrel was seen before the other was out of sight. This species is considered an uncommon migrant by the old French authors. I do not know of a winter record for France.

**Aquila maculata (Gm.).**

The Greater Spotted Eagle is given as a winter visitor to the marshes of the Midi. I saw five birds in all during my stay.

**Buteo buteo buteo** (L.).

Chiefly a winter visitor to the Camargue. Only two birds seen.

**Haliaëtus albicilla** (L.).

A fine adult seen on the shore of the Étang de Valcarès near the Isle Mornue.

**Circus æruginosus** (L.):

The Marsh-Harrier was the most abundant Hawk in the Camargue.

**Circus pygargus** (L.).

A single adult male Montagu's Harrier was seen near the Étang de Valcarès. Considered a rare winter visitor by the old French authors.

**Circus cyaneus** (L.).

The Hen-Harrier was common and was seen daily in the marshes. Though I never saw any open hostility, a Hen-Harrier would immediately leave a hunting-ground if a Marsh-Harrier came along.

**Circus swainsoni** Smith (= *C. macrourus* auct.).

A magnificent adult male was seen near Arles. At a distance in the bright sunlight it looked practically white, with dark wing-tips and tail and a few dark spots on the neck and upper back.

**Accipiter gentilis gentilis** (L.).

Apparently a rare bird in the Midi. Some boys flushed an adult in a pine-wood near Arles, and it flew out into the open over my head, giving me an excellent observation.

**Ardea cinerea** L.

This species was common, and apparently replaces the Purple Heron in winter, which is rare at that season. Certainly I did not succeed in finding any.

**Egretta alba alba** (L.).

A single example of this magnificent species was seen towering among a flock of twenty-four Common Herons on

30 Dec., about five miles north of Les Saintes Maries. Considered as a rare winter straggler by the old French writers, it must now be a very rare bird in France.

**Phœnicopterus antiquorum** Temm.

While I saw no Flamigoes personally, there can be no doubt that it still exists in considerable numbers in the Camargue, as all the natives know the bird well. A flock was seen three days before my arrival flying east near the village of Les Saintes Maries, the number estimated variously at 500–700. The natives claim that in winter this bird occasionally disappears if the water is very low (as was the case during my visit), or when a norther is blowing. They have no theory as to where it goes. They appear to be perfectly familiar with the plumage of the young bird, and claimed that about one-quarter of the individuals in the flock mentioned above were young.

**Anser** sp.

A few Geese were heard at night, and one small flock seen at dawn, when colour details could not be distinguished. Probably the Grey Lag-Goose, other species, according to Crespon, occurring only in severe cold weather.

**Tadorna tadorna** (L.).

Two Sheld-Ducks observed on the Étang de Valcarès, 31 Dec.

**Anas platyrhyncha** L.

The Mallard was almost incredibly abundant, by day flocking on the open waters of the larger Étangs, and flying into the fresher marshes and reed-bordered ponds by night to feed.

**Anas strepera** L.

Only two Gadwall were positively identified. It is undoubtedly common.

**Anas crecca** L.

The Teal was fairly common.

**Anas penelope** L.

The Widgeon was very abundant.

**Spatula clypeata** (L.).

Only one small flock seen.

**Dafila acuta** (L.).

Very common.

**Nyroca fuligula** (L.).

The Tufted Duck was the only one of its subfamily observed—a small flock on the Étang de Valcarès. The presence of the diving-ducks in numbers is a matter of cold weather, according to Crespon, so it is not surprising that I found so few.

**Mergus** sp.

A small flock of large Mergansers seen on the Étang de Valcarès. Probably the Goosander, which is the commoner species according to Crespon, but the absence of adult males made a satisfactory identification impossible.

**Phalacrocorax carbo carbo** (L.).

A common bird; they were seen daily sunning themselves on the fish-weirs in flocks.

**Colymbus cristatus cristatus** (L.).

A single Great Crested Grebe observed in the surf near Les Saintes Maries.

**Columba œnas** L.

Two Stock-Doves were seen at the bull-farm west of the Étang de Valcarès. They were flushed from a little hollow in which a stream ran where there were some real trees. Two Pigeons were seen near Arles, so shy and wild that it was impossible to approach them within several hundred yards.

**Burhinus œdicnemus œdicnemus** (L.).

The strange cry of this bird was heard before dawn in the wastes near the Étang de Valcarès. It seems to be well known to the natives.

**Squatarola squatarola (L.).**

The Grey Plover was not common. A flock of ten was seen in the vast flats of the Isle Mornue in the Étang de Valcarès, and a single individual was seen near Les Saintes Maries.

**Vanellus vanellus (L.).**

The Lapwing was not common, and was absent from the south-western portion of the Camargue.

**Calidris alba (Pallas).**

A large flock of Sanderling seen on the beach near Les Saintes Maries on 29 Dec.

**Erolia alpina alpina (L.).**

The Dunlin was common in large flocks.

**Tringa ochropus L.**

A flock of eight with Redshanks in one of the fresher marshes north of Les Saintes Maries.

**Tringa totanus (L.).**

The Redshank was widely distributed in small numbers.

**Numenius arquata arquata (L.).**

The Curlew could not be called common, compared with its numbers on the coasts of England and Holland. It was seen daily in small numbers.

**Numenius tenuirostris Vieill.**

It was a delightful surprise to see a flock of five of these birds near the Étang de Valcarès, apparently much tamer than the common Curlew, as they allowed a much closer approach. The much shorter and less curved bill is an excellent field-mark, and at any distance the bird has a lighter colour-effect.

**Limnocryptes gallinula (L.).**

Two Jack Snipe were flushed from a marshy meadow near the Étang de Valcarès.

**Larus ridibundus** (L.).

The Black-headed Gull was very common, outnumbering all the other species put together. Not seen off-shore.

**Larus canus canus** L.

Not uncommon.

**Larus argentatus** subsp.

Only two Herring-Gulls were seen, much to my surprise. These were on the Étang de Valcarès, and were not near enough to permit me to say whether they were the northern bird or *cachinnans*, though I am familiar with both.

**Larus fuscus fuscus** L.

A few scattered birds seen daily.

**Porzana porzana** (L.).

Two Spotted Crakes were flushed in a little marsh north of Les Saintes Maries, and one was shot by a local nimrod who had joined me, a feat of which he seemed very proud. It is much more interesting alive than dead. This same bird was served to me by my landlady that evening, beaming with pride, and was by all odds the worst morsel of bird flesh my jaws ever worked on. I greatly prefer Parrots and Woodpeckers!

**Fulica atra atra** L.

A large flock of over one thousand birds on the Étang de Valcarès. The Gulls seemed to get great amusement in chivying them, and would repeatedly swoop down on the rear of the flock, whereupon all would patter wildly over the water for several hundred yards, the rearmost birds tumbling over those in front, so dense was their formation.

**Caccabis rufa rufa** (L.).

This Partridge was common in the northern part of the Camargue, and several coveys were seen from the train, to which they appeared entirely indifferent. A small flock was seen near the Étang de Valcarès.



As a matter of interest I append a list of birds seen on 31 Dec., to give some idea of what a full day can produce, and also the comparative numbers of individuals :

Lesser Black-backed Gull, 2.	Montagu's Harrier, 1 ♂.
Herring-Gull, 2.	Greater Spotted Eagle, 1.
Black-headed Gull, 100.	Sea-Eagle, 1 ad.
Cormorant, 25.	Merlin, 2.
<i>Mergus</i> sp., 15.	Kestrel, 2.
Mallard, 100,000.	Sky-Lark, 100.
Widgeon, 100,000.	Wood-Lark, 2.
Teal, 50.	Magpie, 25.
Pintail, 1000.	Greenfinch, 6.
Shoveler, 6.	Linnet, 4.
Sheld-Duck, 2.	Goldfinch, 4.
Tufted Duck, 15.	Chaffinch, 1.
<i>Anser</i> sp., 6.	House-Sparrow, 10.
Grey Heron, 4.	Reed-Bunting, 4.
Coot, 1000.	Meadow-Pipit (common).
Jack Snipe, 2.	Tree-Pipit, 10.
Dunlin, 500.	Water-Pipit (several).
Redshank, 4.	Wren, 2.
Curlew, 1	Dartford Warbler, 3.
Slender-billed Curlew, 5.	Willow-Wren, 6.
Grey Plover, 10.	Gold-crest, 1
Lapwing, 5.	Aquatic Warbler, 3.
Stone-Curlew, 6.	Fantail Warbler, 1.
Red-legged Partridge, 4.	Black Redstart, 1.
Stock-Dove, 2.	Robin, 1.
Marsh-Harrier, 6.	Blackbird, 1.
Hen-Harrier, 1 ♀.	

XXXIII.—*A note on the genus Lampribus in East and Central Africa.* By JAMES P. CHAPIN, M.A.O U., American Museum of Natural History.

*Lampribus olivacea* and *Lampribus rara*.—Both these rare African Ibises range eastward to the Ituri Forest, where a single specimen of each was collected by the American Museum Congo Expedition at Avakubi. A second example of *Lampribus rara* was also secured at Niapi, in the Bomokandi region of the Uele.